



New E.R.I.K.A. Card Program Launched by W.M.P.D. Program Aims to Prevent Scams; Help Those Truly in Need

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Whitestown, Ind. –

It's a scene that pulls at your heartstrings; seeing a woman looking distressed, holding a sign that reads something like: "Ran out of gas. Trying to get home. Please help." It's a scene similar to something that played out here in Whitestown a couple of months ago, when a resident was approached by a probable scam artist who claimed to have been in a fight with her boyfriend. She said she needed to get to Tennessee and was begging for cash. When the resident said she had no cash, the person asked for a ride to the nearest ATM. Thankfully, that raised a red flag and the resident, Erika, quickly got herself out of the situation.

Upon telling her father what had happened, Erika's dad (who happens to sit on the police board) said jokingly, "Maybe we need an 'Erika's law' to protect our residents from scam artists, yet still provide help for people with an actual hardship." What started with a chuckle has quickly turned into a brand new program at the Whitestown Metropolitan Police Department.

Erika's dad, Mike Hancock, brought the idea to his fellow police commissioners and Chief of Police Dennis Anderson, and the E.R.I.K.A. card program was created. E.R.I.K.A. stands for 'Emergency Response In Kindness Assistance'.

Chief Anderson secured private funding for the program, so no tax payer dollars will be used. Thanks to those private donations, the Whitestown Metropolitan Police Department now has 20 cards worth \$25 each. Police supervisors on each shift will have the authority to issue cards, which can be used to pay for emergency food, gas, or repairs. Now, instead of handing cash to someone asking for money on the street, residents are asked to contact police who can substantiate a stranded motorist's story and issue an E.R.I.K.A. card to them to get them back on the road safely.

"We've done this recently on our own," explains Chief of Police Dennis Anderson. "Our police officers have given their own money to help those stranded on I-65 to get a new battery or fill up their tank to get them and their families back on their way. This program will allow us to give more help where help is actually needed, and cut down on the scams that, sadly, happen everywhere." says Chief Anderson.

A shift supervisor may elect to utilize one or more E.R.I.K.A. cards during the same incident if it is determined that a single card will not provide for the immediate need. An 'informational report' will be taken and the recipient's information will be documented. The new E.R.I.K.A. card program goes into effect August 1st, 2018.

"This program would not have happened without Chief Anderson taking this idea seriously and making it a reality." says Hancock. "Whitestown should be proud of its public safety professionals."

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